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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Spring Success for Bald Eagles on the Channel Islands

This week biologists and dedicated eagle enthusiasts watched via the Channel Islands Live EagleCAM as two chicks hatched at the Pelican Harbor nest on Santa Cruz Island, off the coast of southern California.

This is the third year of successful nesting attempts by the Pelican Harbor pair and the third and fourth eagle chicks they have hatched unaided in the wild. Their parenting skills may be challenged as this is the first time they have had two chicks to feed. However, bald eagles commonly raise between one and three young.

Just prior to the first chick hatching on Tuesday morning, April 1, 2008, the six-year-old female adult eagle was seen fidgeting between the sitting and standing position as she monitored the egg intently. By midday, hours after the first egg hatched, the seven-year-old male parent eagle had fed the new chick its first meal of fish.

Today, in the early morning hours, the second chick arrived and was welcomed by over 700 avid eagle enthusiasts who watched the drama live via the Internet. Over the next three months the public can observe the behaviors and growth of the new eagle chicks prior to their fledging expected sometime in mid-June.

“It is thrilling to see the recovery of bald eagles following their extirpation from the Channel Islands,” said Russell Galipeau, Superintendent of Channel Islands National Park. “In just six years we have progressed from releasing birds to the wild to birds being born in the wild.”

Biologists are cautiously optimistic about this trend of recovery as the chemicals that contributed to bald eagle decline persist in the southern California marine ecosystem. They hope for up to two dozen nests within the next five years— a return to historic levels of bald eagle nests on the northern Channel Islands.

An intensive eagle watch will continue in the coming weeks with hopes for discovery of additional nests and successful hatchings at currently active nests on Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa Islands. Five nests are expected to produce up to seven young eaglets this spring on Catalina Island. Thus far, two have been born in the wild and one in an incubation facility on Catalina Island.

Nearly 40 bald eagles are currently residing in Channel Islands National Park as a result of a restoration program that released 61 eagles between 2002 and 2006.

History of Recovery

In 2006, the same bald eagle pair made headlines when their chick (A-49) hatched on Santa Cruz Island. It was the first bald eagle chick to hatch on the Channel Islands unaided by humans in over 50 years. A-49, now a two-year-old, has been tracked flying between central California and the Channel Islands.

Prior to 2006, the last known successful nesting of a bald eagle on the northern Channel Islands was in 1950 on Santa Rosa Island. Bald eagles disappeared from the Channel Islands by the early 1960s, due to human impacts, primarily pollution. Millions of pounds of DDTs and PCBs released into the ocean off the Palos Verdes Peninsula between the 1940s and the 1970s continue to contaminate the regional food web. The effects of these chemicals are magnified in the food chain, causing bald eagles to lay thin-shelled eggs that either dehydrate or break in the nest.

A Partnership for Bald Eagle Recovery

The bald eagle restoration efforts on the Channel Islands are funded by the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program (MSRP), a multi-agency program dedicated to restoring natural resources harmed by DDTs and PCBs released into the environment by Montrose Chemical Corporation and other industrial sources in southern California in the mid 20th century. MSRP includes representatives from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, California Department of Fish and Game, California State Lands Commission, and California Department of Parks and Recreation. Further information on MSRP can be found at: www.montroserestoration.gov.

The National Park Service and The Nature Conservancy, co-owners of Santa Cruz Island, remind visitors that bald eagles are a federally protected species and that it is illegal to disturb nesting birds. Disturbances can cause eagles to accidentally break the eggs or fly away from the nest, leaving the eggs vulnerable to predators.

The Institute for Wildlife Studies, a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of wildlife species, is involved in conservation projects around the world. IWS has conducted bald eagle restoration on Catalina Island for over 25 years, as well as efforts on the northern islands within Channel Islands National Park. For links to webcams on Catalina and Santa Cruz Islands go to: www.iws.org

Using Technology to Share Success

The EagleCAM is one of a number of educational opportunities offered as part of Channel Islands Live (CHIL), a cooperative partnership between Channel Islands National Park and the Ventura County Office of Education. Through CHIL, students have been able to watch the eagles in real time over the Internet. Teachers can then guide student learning according to state-adopted science standards. The EagleCAM and associated discussion board can be found at: http://chil.vcoe.org/eagle_cam.htm

This publication is available online at: www.nps.gov/chis/parknews/newsreleases.htm

